

EPICHORISTODES ACERBELLA (WALKER) (LEP.: TORTRICIDAE). THE FIRST OCCURRENCE OF A WILD-CAUGHT MOTH IN GREAT BRITAIN¹STEVEN NASH AND ²MARTIN CORLEY¹23 Henley Drive, Highworth, Wiltshire SN6 7JU.²Pucketty Farm Cottage, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 8JP.**Abstract**

The first capture of a wild-caught adult of *Epichoristodes acerbella* (Walker) (Lep.: Tortricidae) in Britain is reported. The occurrence is discussed and some hints for recognising the species are given.

Introduction

On the morning of 26 July 2002, whilst sorting through the contents of the Robinson m.v. trap in his parents' garden in Fernham, Oxfordshire (within that part of the county which falls into Vice-county 22: Berkshire), the first author found a male of an unfamiliar looking tortricid resting on the wall near the trap. The moth was later photographed, and a copy of the image loaded to the files area of the UK Moths e-group forum for comment. The only suggestion forthcoming was that it could be an ochreous form of *Acleris rufana* D. & S., however its normal foodplant (*Myrica gale*) is not found in the north-west part of VC 22, and the moth itself had not been recorded in the vice-county for over 100 years. With this in mind the specimen was set, and eventually passed to the second author for dissection. It was at once apparent that the moth was not an *Acleris*. It was evidently a member of the Archipini, but did not match any of the native or established alien species of the tribe.

This led to consideration of the possibility that it might be either *Homona menciiana* (Walker) or *Epichoristodes acerbella* (Walker). A drawing of the genitalia was sent to Kevin Tuck at the Natural History Museum, London. Kevin was quick to confirm that the moth was indeed *Epichoristodes acerbella* – the first occurrence of a wild-caught moth in the UK.

The moth is illustrated in Plate A. However, the description that follows is based on 51 specimens in the Natural History Museum, London. Wingspan 16 – 26 mm. Male with head and anterior part of thorax ochreous to dark brown. Forewing narrow, without costal fold, apex slightly falcate; ground colour yellowish or ochreous; base of costa sometimes dark brown, fasciate markings absent or reduced to an irregularly shaped dark brown tornal blotch, occasionally with a second spot, most specimens with scattered blackish scales on the forewing. Hindwing whitish grey. The adult moth is illustrated by Razowski (2002). Male genitalia are figured by Chambon (1999) and Razowski (2002). The aedcagus has a patch of small carinae externally, which readily distinguishes it from other Archipini found in the UK. We found no significant differences in markings between males and females except that a few females had scattered blackish scales on the forewing. The female genitalia are figured by Razowski (2002).

E. acerbella is a variable species. Specimens with yellow forewings usually have light coloured head and thorax; those with ochreous forewings have dark head and front of thorax, this colour extending to a variable extent along costa. The dark brown tornal blotch is frequently extended as a narrow streak along the dorsum, and in heavily marked specimens it can form an oblique partial fascia extending to nearly half way across the wing. Occasionally this is broken into two spots. A few specimens had a small spot in mid-wing at 5/6 wing length. Three specimens from Madagascar were only 13 – 17 mm wingspan, and were heavily marked, one specimen having a spot on the costa representing the costal end of the fascia. The Fernham specimen was unique among the material examined in having scattered blackish scales with no other dark markings.

E. acerbella has been recorded previously from Britain as larvae intercepted at airports on flowers imported from Africa, particularly *Dianthus* from East Africa (Bradley *et. al.*, 1973). Also reported on chinchinchees (*Ornithogalum thyrsoides*) from South Africa (Pelham-Clinton, 1969). Razowski (2002) gives other plant genera as food plants: *Chrysanthemum*, *Erigeron*, *Sonchus* (Asteraceae), *Medicago*, *Lupinus* (Fabaceae), *Capparis* (Capparidaceae), *Lycopersicon* (Solanaceae), *Rosa*, *Malus*, *Pyrus*, *Prunus* (Rosaceae) and *Carex* (Cyperaceae). In Africa it is recorded from South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Reunion and Madagascar. It occurs as an introduction in Southern Europe (Mediterranean parts of France, Spain and Italy), where it can become a pest of cultivated *Dianthus* and *Chrysanthemum*. Razowski (2002) also mentions that it occurs in greenhouses in Britain, Germany and Denmark.

At present it is only possible to speculate on the origin of the Fernham moth. It is unlikely that it is breeding outdoors in Fernham. It could have come from discarded imported flowers obtained from a florist or as an escape from a greenhouse in which it is breeding. The British climate is probably not sufficiently warm for it to become established in the wild, but in view of the continued spread of other introduced tortricids, particularly *Epiphyas postvittana* (Walker), this possibility cannot be excluded.

Acknowledgements

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Plate A. *Epichoristodes acerbella* (Walker) (Lep.: Tortricidae) male, 26.vii.2002, Fernham, Berkshire (VC 22). Photograph: ©Steven Nash, 2003

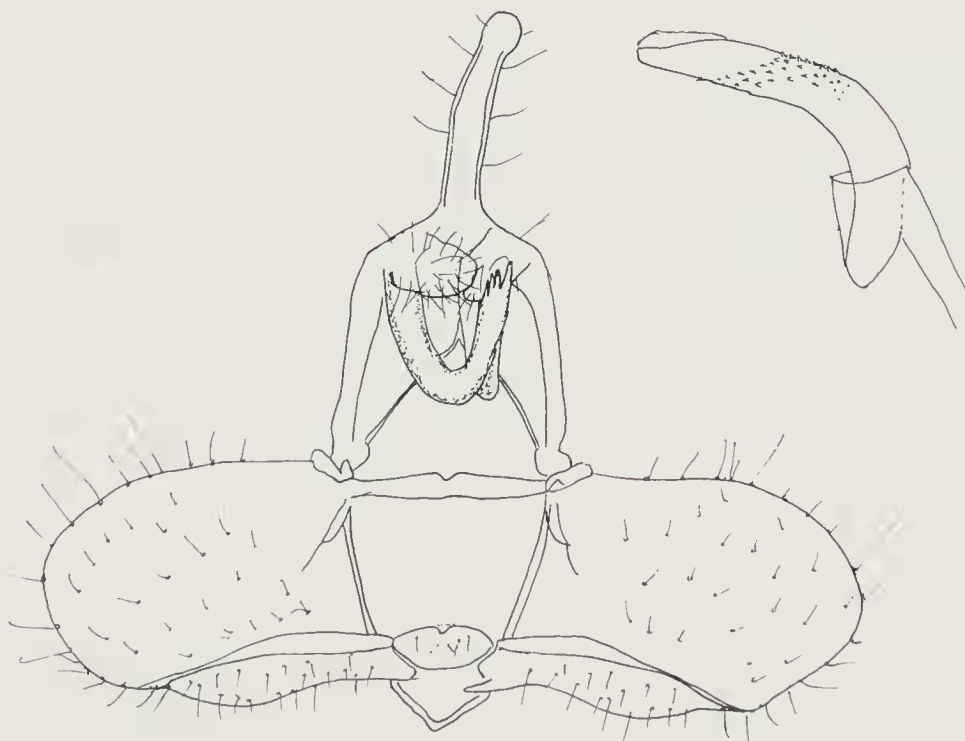


Figure 1. Male genitalia of *Epichoristodes acerbella* (Walker) (Lep.: Tortricidae), 26.vii.2002, Fernham, Berkshire (VC 22). Illustration: ©Martin Corley, 2003